

MR. REDGRAVE ON THE SCHOOL OF DESIGN.

TO THE RIGHT HON. LORD JOHN RUSSELL.

MY LORD,—As your lordship's attention will be engaged, during the recess, on those great educational measures which your administration has led the country to expect, you will, I hope, pardon my laying before you some observations, which are calculated to improve the efficiency of the schools founded for the improvement of design as applied to manufactures, since it is to be expected that the removal of commercial restrictions must be met by great exertions on the part of the manufacturers—and it is in the application of design that manufacturing industry is most deficient, as compared with the advance in other directions; and, since there is reason to believe that the endeavours of her Majesty's Government to assist in supplying that deficiency are not the most effectual that might be made even at the existing scale of expense.

There are three stages of instruction in design: the first, the acquisition of technical skill, consisting of the power of imitating the form and colour of objects, acquired by carefully copying the fine examples of former times, and the works of nature.

The second, the inculcation of a pure taste in design, together with the exposition of the principles upon which those fine examples have been composed, and their adaptation to the end for which they were composed; and, including, therefore, the knowledge required to form original combinations from nature, and to apply them to the new purpose required.

Thirdly, The knowledge of manufacturing processes, with which the masters should be conversant, that they may be able to direct design into the proper channels, and to teach the students to unite beauty and fitness with practicability.

Of these three divisions of education in design, in the schools now open at Somerset House, the first division alone is in any degree effectually taught, the second very imperfectly, while the third is not at all attended to—and yet the masters selected are men well adapted by their acquirements and talent to give effectual instruction to the pupils: it is true they are too few for the requirements of such an educational establishment, but, what is worse, they are cramped by the present constitution of the school, which prevents them from making their talents effectual for the benefit of the pupils, so that the school seems liable to merge into a mere Government Drawing School, from which creative design will soon be wholly expelled.

Art has grown up in this country individually, each man actuated by his own spirit, and independently following his own path; and this, opposed as it is to the continental growth of art, in schools adopting the opinions of one master—by some considered its weakness—may, on the contrary, be viewed as its strength, by the originality of aim which it induces. From this cause our artists have an independent self-reliance, which, whilst it gives them great energy in the pursuits they undertake, unfits them for working in subordinate relations, even if it were requisite they should do so under one of great eminence in their own pursuits; yet the foundation of the School of

Design is such, that men selected for their talents and acquirements are controlled in the use of them by a director, who, however generally competent, must be far less acquainted than they are with that peculiar knowledge which they are required to impart—and whose object it must be, by occasional interference, to assert his own primary authority to which they are bound to submit. This causes the masters either gradually to remit their exertions, which, even if successful, redound to the credit of the director, and to content themselves with merely routine instruction; or leads to dissensions which equally impair the efficiency of the school. Permit me here to assure you, my lord, that in these, or any other objections I may make, I am most anxious to be considered as having no personal reference to the present director, but only to the office, which I think a useless one, and that it might well devolve on the secretary, or at least be confined to the business apart from the teaching in the schools. From this clashing of the offices of director and masters, men of the highest talent have already been lost to the schools, and it will, I am convinced, from personal knowledge* of the working, again produce, if continued, the same result, or that other which I have pointed out above.

This arrangement of the relative offices of director and master, whereby the latter is subordinated, is of itself a great hindrance to the progress of the schools; but Government further retards the energies, and indeed the means of usefulness, of the masters, by the inadequacy of their salaries. I speak principally, at present, as to the evening school, the most important as regards amount of attendance, and as meeting the wants of that large class whose daily engagements prevent their study at other hours. To this school the Government has appointed gentlemen of much ability in their several departments of art, and seems to have supposed that as but an apparently small portion of their time is required, a small payment may suffice for their remuneration—forgetting the inroad into that quiet which their professional pursuits require, and the lost energy which the wearing and constantly recurring duties of teaching, as at present demanded of them, induces; forgetting also, that talent, such as is requisite that these schools may be raised to the greatest amount of efficiency, cannot, under present arrangements, be at all repaid by that public estimation of their labours which all men prize, and which ought at least to obtain the appreciation of the Government which employs it, and such pecuniary payment as would induce men to devote heart and energy to bring the schools to the greatest state of usefulness, instead of being obliged to consider them a secondary object.

I trust, my lord, that you will feel with me, that the intention of these schools is not to educate artists, in the usual acceptance of the word, but ornamental designers; and to do this, the appreciation of talent in design should be high, and the office of professors in these schools should be so upheld, that they may take a scarcely inferior rank to the professors of the higher schools of the Royal Academy, and then there would be less inducement for students in design to turn from a diligent pursuit of industrial art under them, to burthen the higher walks with indifferent artists; but how can this be the case when those artists who are appointed to the office are placed in a situation little, if any, better than mere drawing masters, to teach the common routine of imitation?

This leads me to remark on the efficiency of the system, as regards the inculcation of principles of design, the second division in my classification: this must at present be done individually to each student in the course of his drawing lesson. How much better and easier, both to student and master, might this be done, by occasional lectures, pointing out to all—

The principles of beauty in composition.

Of preference in the choice of forms.

Of opposition, contrast, and arrangement of colours.

The governing principles of the various styles.

The mode of imitating nature, and of applying imitation to the various wants of art

in stone, metal, wood, the various textile and fictile fabrics, &c.

The principles of *finesse* in the application of ornament, which is, and has been, almost wholly overlooked.

The ancients deeply studied *finesse* in all their works; but their designs are applied by the moderns without any regard to that *finesse*: hence mural crowns and wreaths of victory decorate the front of a spirit shop; and in the interior of a church (as at Dorset, in Berkshire), we find Liotor's rods coupled with the thyrus of Bacchus, in a Christian temple: these faults are more apparent in architecture, since that art has become almost wholly one of imitation and precedent, but the incongruities are equally great in many other applications of design. This alone is an argument against the long-continued reference to, and study of, the antique, which from its very beauty becomes an object of idleness, from the worship of which it is hard to escape. Surely if the Greeks avowed, that NATURE, as in the honeysuckle and ammonite, was their model, we may well return to such a source:—if Sir Christopher Wren studied the structure of a shell, to found on it a new construction for a spire, and Simon Stenton from the growth of an oak gathered the best form for his enduring light-house—NATURE, teeming with the beautiful, may at least be thought a fit source whence we should derive our ornament, after the principles have been studied, by which nature is submitted to art in the models of the great artists who have gone before us.

Lectures on those and other subjects should form an important part of the duties of the professors; while the junior masters, themselves preparing for higher office in the provincial schools, might fitly take the burthen of elementary instruction.

Again, the remuneration for the labours of those whom I would fain look upon as professors rather than mere teachers, precludes their attention to the third division of my arrangement entirely—that is to say, the knowledge of manufacturing processes: to fit them for this, they should be enabled and required to pay occasional yet repeated visits (perhaps during the recesses) to the great seats of manufactures both here and abroad, in order to appreciate their wants in design, and the amount of art which has been, and may be, applied in the improvement of their various manufactures. This I look upon as a very important part of the knowledge required of a professor in the School of Design, as being greatly suggestive, and also as enabling him to direct successfully the attention of the students to, and to advise them in, the best application of their talent.

Thus, with alterations in the position, and perhaps in the number of the masters, and under the new mode of instruction suggested, we might hope that the trammels of mere imitation would be broken, and NATURE, as the true source of ornamental design, more fully insisted on, and then the students called on to adapt ornamental design to purposes and fabrics with which the Greeks and Romans were totally unacquainted, would learn that the principles of taste only are to be sought in the antique application of art to the wants of their age, and that while we are content to seek the principles, we are not to be fettered by the mere imitation of their application; and the schools, taking their true position, would produce artists capable of original inventions, and would soon supply the wants of the manufacturers with a race of designers able to rival, nay surpass, the tasteful exertions of the foreigner,—thus fulfilling the hopes of the country, and the intentions of her Majesty's government.

Having thus urged upon your lordship's attention regulations as to the masters, I would in the second place, advocate an addition to the school, which I trust would be found of eminent advantage,—the establishment of a biennial exhibition of works of design, open to the public, and to contributions from others as well as from students. To this might be added a few prizes for careful and elaborate drawings from nature of uncultivated plants, and their display as ornament, and for the best application of ornamental design to useful purposes. I am aware that the Society of Arts are desirous to offer their prizes largely through such an exhibition. There is no doubt, also, that it would interest the public and improve

* I attended the Figure Class for one month during the absence of Mr. J. Calcott Horsley.